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ABSTRACT

Using the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto as a basis for discussion, this paper examines the role of the public library within developing countries and reviews the major developments in public library services in Africa subsequent to the two UNESCO seminars on Public Library Development held in Nigeria in 1962. A number of key statements from the UNESCO Manifesto are quoted and discussed. The recommendations of the seminars on Public Library Development in Africa are then summarized with respect to: (1) the role of libraries in educational, economic, and social development; (2) the development of national plans for public library services; (3) the production, acquisition, and selection of books and other library materials; (4) customs duties affecting libraries; (5) the development of branch libraries and bookmobile programs; and (6) the financial support of public libraries. Specific developments which followed from the recommendations are described, with emphasis on the series of conferences that led to the formulation and implementation of the National Information System (NATIS) concept. A consideration of the importance of rural services closes the report. A 9-item reference list accompanies the text. (JL)

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE UNESCO MANIFEST,

- The African Experience*-

by
E.E. Kaungamno

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY; VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE UNESCO MANIFESTO

The African Experience

by

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The Unesco Public Library Manifesto, is, to my mind, an excellent philosophy about what a public library is and what it should do in a deveped and developing country.

Just what is the Unesco Public Library Manifesto? I will quote some of the key statements in the document to refresh our minds:

> "The public library is a practical demonstration of democracy's faith in universal education as a continuing and life long process, in the appreciation of the achievement of humanity in knowledge and culture".

For it to be truly public it must fulfil some of the following conditions:

> "It should be maintained wholly from public funds, and no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services"
>
> "..... the public library must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the Community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age sex, religion, language, status or educational attainment."
>
> ".... it should be established under the clear mandate of law, so framed to ensure nationwide provision of public library service".

With regard to the resources and services to be rendered, the Manifesto states that:

> "Organized cooperation between libraries is essential so that total national resources should be fully used and be at the service of any reader".

...../2..

"The public library is concerned with the refreshment of man's spirit by the provision of books for relaxation and pleasure, .. and with provision of up-to-date technical scientific and sociological information".

"The total collection should include material on all subjects to satisfy all tastes at differing educational and and cultural backgrounds".

"All languages used by a community should be represented."

"The public library must offer to adults and children the opportunity to keep in touch with their times, to educate themselves continuously..."

"... Books, periodicals, newspapers remain the most important resources of public libraries. But Science has created new forms of record and these will become an increasing part of the library's stock including print in reduced form for compact storage, and transport, films slides, gramophone records, audio and video tape ..."

"The public library building should be centrally situated, accessible to the physically handicapped, and open at times convenient to the user".

"The building and its furnishings should be attractive in-formal and welcoming, and direct access by the readers to the shelves in essential".

"Branch libraries and mobile libraries should be provided in rural and suburban areas".

"Trained and competent staff in adequate numbers are vital to select and organize resources and assist users ..."

There are many drawbacks besetting an active role on the part of the public library in the (and conceptual framework of the Unesco Manifesto.

Regional seminars and conferences have been convened to discuss development of public libraries in Africa.

The Unesco Seminar on Public Library Development in Africa held in Ibadan, Nigeria and another one in 1962 at the University of Nigeria (Enugu Campus) on the same theme (again sponsored by Unesco) laid down guidelines for library development on the continent. The 1962 Seminar's recommendations in particular are worth noting in detail as they generally reflect the public library situation in Africa to-day and what ought to be done to improve it:[1]

(1) The role of the public library in educational, economic and social development

It was noted that in the newly developing nations the public library has a vital contribution to make in that through its network of service points, it can take books to a large number of people of various backgrounds. The participants noting that there were no effective public libraries made the following recommendations:

(a) "Realizing the importance of the work of public libraries in the field of education in ensuring, amongst other things, that suitable reading materials are available at all levels - primary, secondary and higher - and that new literates do not lapse into illiteracy through lack of reading materials, Governments should be asked to include the development of public libraries as an integral part of the general educational development plan of the country".

(b) "That recognizing the value of public libraries as institutions contributing actively toward economic, social and cultural development, Governments should accept the terms of the Unesco Manifesto by providing libraries, without charge, for all members of the community".

(c) "The seminar having noted that the extensive report of the Addis Ababa Conference[2] included detailed plans for educational development in Africa but that it did not include any plans for libraries recommended the following:

(i) Unesco should in future place the development of public libraries on the agendas of general educational conferences.

(ii) that governments, when organizing national conferences or choosing delegates to international conferences on educational planning should make provision for competent representation of library interests. High - level librarians should be present and participate in the planning".

(2) A national plan for a public library service

To make the public library really effective, it was advised that planning should be at a national level so as to provide an equal standard throughout the whole country. The seminar was of the opinion that central control of a public library service was desirable at the initial stage of development. It was also advised that the national plan should include the following provisions:

(a) Legislation

While it was realized that no single model act would be suitable for all African countries it was recommended that legislation establishing a public library service on a national level should be enacted in all countries. It was deemed necessary to establish legally a national library board or other body responsible for the promotion of public libraries.

(b) Training of staff

The Seminar realized the urgent need for sufficient and qualified library staff particularly librarians. It was therefore recommended:

(i) "That in view of the present shortage of qualified librarians in many African countries and of the means of training them at all levels, governments give serious consideration to the following:

- the provision of scholarships for library training at existing library schools either in Africa or overseas,
- the setting up of library schools in their own countries, or the pooling of their resources with other governments for the establishment of regional library schools".

(ii) "That considering the importance of the place of libraries in the general educational and economic development of the country and the need to attract staff of the highest quality, governments ensure that librarians are accorded guarantees of career possibilities and salaries commensurate with their qualifications and responsibilities".

(3) Books and related library materials

The problems regarding the production, selection and acquisition of suitable publications for public libraries in Africa were also discussed. It was recommended:

...../5..

(a) "That considering the acute shortage of books and other related library materials suitable for public libraries in Africa, action should be taken by governments .. and Unesco to support the many agencies (eg. literature bureaux)working in the field, and to request publishers in Africa and oversees, to increase their activity in this direction,"

(b) That Unesco consider the production of graded lists of books suitable for African children in French, English and other languages.

(4) Custom duty

The Seminar reported that books and other library materials were, subject to custom duties. Bearing in mind the importance o f libraries in educational, scientific and cultural fields, it was recommended that governments should be requested to exempt books and other library materials, library supplies and specialized equipment from import duties and taxes.

(5) Bookmobiles and branch libraries

To reach the majority of people in rural areas the use of bookmobiles and branch libraries was found necessary. The seminar noted that it was essential to conduct a population survey before deciding what areas should be served by branch libraries and which should be served by bookmobiles. The meeting recommended that the development of branch libraries should take place only when there was a good central library service on which to base it.

(6) Finance

The Seminar noted that the financial position of African countries was the limiting in the development of public libraries. The following standards were recommended:

(a) "That whatever public library service were to be established in African countries in 1963 an initial expenditure of about $4,300 (US dollars) per ½ million inhabitants was the minimum sum required.

(b) By 1970 the annual expenditure on public library services should have been about 1 per cent of the annual expenditure in the country on education and

(c) By 1980 about 2 per cent of such expenditure

(d) Those African countries whose annual average per capital income is less than $100 should aim to spend on public library services

(i) by 1970 about 2 per cent of the annual expenditure in the country on education and

(ii) by 1980 about 4 per cent of such expenditure.

THE WIND OF CHANGE

Since these recommendations were made in 1962, there have been some improments although not as much as one would wish. Many of the recommendations have not yet been implemented by the governments concerned.

In this respect, therefore, the Unesco Public Library Manifesto has not been fully implemented. However it should be borne in mind that the history of library movement in Africa is comparatively short.[3] In 1953 when the Ibadan Seminar was organized, out of the twenty-nine librarians and educators who participated in the seminar only eight were Africans. Politically, most of the African population was under colonial rule. During 1962 the only well developed public library services were those of Eastern Nigeria Ghana and Sierra Leone. As far as training of librarians is concerned, there were library schools in Ghana and Nigeria only.

Ghana (then Gold Coast) which passed the first legislation in developing Africa (1949) has influenced many African countries. With the passage of similar legislation in Eastern Nigeria (1955), Sierra Leone (1959), Tanzania (1963) Uganda (1964) and Kenya (1965) the public movement spread across the continet. Many other independent African countries have enacted legislation to establish national library services.

Some progress has also been made in library education and manpower planning. The 1972 Unesco Statistical Year Book indicated that there were 1,207 full time librarians. The increase in the number of trained librarians is due partly to the increase in library schools.

Since 1962 library Schools have been established in Senegal, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia. Plans for additional Library Schools are under way in Tanzania and Kenya.

The NATIS Concept

Beginning around 1970 a new conceptual framework which has affected the public library has beed developed in planning as indicated in the deliberations the following meetings:

The Meeting of Experts on Planning of Documentation and Library Services in Africa - Kampala, Uganda 7 - 15 December 1970[4]

This meeting, convened by Unesco, was concerned mainly with evolving principles for national planning of documentation and library services in African countries in relation to social , economic and educational plans. 'Documentation' and "integrated planning" were given great emphasis. Two of the major recommendations made in thus respect were that*

1. (a) While it is recognized that patterns of organization of library and information services will of necessity differ from one country to another, early steps be taken in each country to create a single national body, backed by the necessary legislation, with responsibility for the planning and development of a fully integrated national library and information systems.

   (b) That such bodies should be responsible to one minister who would act as its spokesman in the body politic. Their membership should of fully representative of all agencies requiring the provision of library and information services and of all government ministries concerned, including planning and finance.

2. Every effort be made by Unesco to ensure that no rigid distinction between libraries and documentation centres are introduced into Africa since documentation services are an integral part of all library and information services.

The International Conference on the Development of Documentation and Information Networks in East Africa - Nairobi, Kenya - 24th July - 1st August 1973[5]

Organised by the then East African Academy in cooperation with the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) and with the assistance of Unesco, the Conference discussed ways and means of stimulating a rapid development in documentation in the East Africa region.

The main recommendations adopted by the Conference included the following:

(a) Recognizing the importance of empirical information and data in the process of economic and social development in developing countries, the conference recommends that governments of developing countries should urgently formulate national documentation policies and integrate policies in the national development plans.

(b) That each national government should create or cause the creation of an information unit in each Ministry, statutory body and other specialized institutions, to collect, evaluate, process and disseminate information in collaboration with a central agency in the same country.

(c) That a national documentation centre be created in each country with key functions of

(i) Coordinating the work of all documentation centres providing information in specific subject areas and geographical regions.

(ii) Collecting data and information on on-going and completed research as well as development projects and providing information in those areas.

(d) that a government or government chartered body be created to guide, stimulate and coordinate all information services and to establish national information priorities.

Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives infrastructures - Paris, 23rd - 27th September 1974[6]

The NATIS (National Information Systems) Concept was accepted at the Paris conference. During this meeting Unesco's member States resolved that libraries, documentation centres and archives, which are indispensable sources of information, ought to be planned in a coordinated manner to avoid duplication of resources and to maximize the use of all relevant information vital for the social and economic development of a country.

After the Paris conference, regional expert meetings were convened as follow-ups of the implementation of the NATIS concept. The deliberations of following two meetings are important:

Conference of African Librarians, Accra, Ghana
22nd - 26th September 1975[7]

This conference which was organized by the Ghana Library Board and the Ghana Library Association, with assistance from Unesco had the following objectives:

(a) to bring librarians in Black Africa together to participate in the celebration of Ghana Library Board's 25th Anniversary.

(b) To review library developments within that period and

(c) to discuss and draw up a blueprint for library developments and prospects of the future in Africa.

The participants having noted that the concept of NATIS had been accepted by Member States of Unesco recommended, among other things, the following:

(a) For NATIS to operate in practise, National Information Systems Commissions should be established in all African countries to plan its objectives.

(b) The National Information Systems Commission should be composed a librarians, archivists, documentalists information Scientists, user agencies and all other bodies interested in dissemination of information

The conference also endorsed the principles of the UNISIST (World Science Information System) programme which will enable African countries to benefit from scientific and technical information badly needed for development.

Meeting of Experts on Planning Documentation and Library Networks in Africa, Brazzaville People's Republic of Congo, 5th - 10th July 1976[8]

This meeting which was organized by Unesco in cooperation with the Government of the People's Republic of Congo had the following objectives:

(a) to examine recent efforts made by African Member states, to plan and develop their national information systems (NATIS)

(b) to make recommendations for the creation of networks of documentation and library services adapted to rapidly evolving needs of Africa users.

The participants endorsed the recommendations and objectives put forward at the Kampala Meeting, the Intergovernmental Conference in Paris and the Accra Conference.

The recommendations of all these conference show what course of action the public library ought to take and the dilemma facing it. Apart from providing normal basic services, the public library has to render sophiscated services to cope with the 20th century global library and information trends. The level and kind of basic services provided in Africa now are for lack of funds and manpower, probably similar to those which were offered by developed countries a century ago. At the same time, some African countries expect their public libraries to provide sophisticated services similar to those given by, say, the Library of Congress, The British Library, or the Lenin State Library. This is a great dilemma which can be compromised by striking the right balance-a very difficult task indeed. The provision of library services to rural areas for example, should be fundamental in all public libraries as is the provision of documentation services to planners, decision makers and administrators. I will elaborate this point:

Rural library services in Africa are vital mainly because:

(a) Peasants, who constitute the majority of the population of most African countries live in rural areas. To enable a country to develop, rural people must change their life style because they play a crucial role in development.

(b) Agriculture is the backbone of the economies of African countries. It is therefore crucial that food production should increase at a faster rate that that of population if economic development is to take place.

(c) The political stability of African countries depends in part on the satisfaction of the needs of peasants otherwise disastrous revolutions are bound to occur.

To be effective, rural library services must be planned to complement adult education programmes, particularly functional literacy projects. Rural libraries should provide follow up reading materials so that neoliterates do not relapse into illiteracy. If such rural services are administered successfu they have probably the biggest political impact.

and, public libraries will, as a result, get more funds from Governments.

The provision of documentation services to decision makers, planners and administrators is also necessary even though they form, comparatively speaking, a small percentage of the population in African countries. One of the reasons why libraries in general, and public libraries, in particular, are not given the recognition they deserve, is because they do not provide decision makers, planners and administrators with information they require. No wonder these top-level people, do not appreciate the public library's role in development; hence the inadequate funds provided for libraries. It is vital that top management should receive quickly just that vital information which it needs to reach its decisions. The delivery of relevant and reliable information in good time is crucial for making the right decision. If an administrator makes a decision without appropriate information, he guesses. He gambles with government funds at his disposal and the end result is a waste of the meagre resources.

In order, therefore, for the public library of today to perform its traditional services as well as new ones (eg. documentation) there is need to integrate library and documentation services in its structure. This integration must be clearly reflected in organization charts. Public libraries ought to provide documentation services in cooperation with other types of libraries. Documentation is not the task of special libraries or documentation centres only. The field of knowledge is so vast that all types of libraries can disseminate information in mutually agreed disciplines or subjects of specialization. The integration of library and documentation services is a necessary change that a public library ought to accept if its going to play a significant role in development and if it's going to be recognised. By doing so it will also be implementing the suggestions put forward in the Unesco Manifesto.

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